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1962/10/26

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TO: Secretary of State

NO: 1696, OCTOBER 26, 4 PM

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ACTION DEPARTMENT PRIORITY 1696, INFORMATION MOSCOW 57,
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(b) (1)

TO authority to:

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FOLLOWING IS NORTHERN DEPT'S ASSESSMENT OF SOVIET MOTIVES
IN DECISION TO INTRODUCE STRATEGIC MISSILES INTO CUBA
WHICH BEING SUBMITTED TODAY TO JIC FOR ITS APPROVAL:
1. IT MUST BE ASSUMED THAT SOVIETS CALCULATED THAT US
WOULD SOONER OR LATER BECOME AWARE OF EXTENT OF MISSILE
SITES (THEY CANNOT BE CAMOUFLAGED) AND THAT SOME VIGOROUS
RESPONSE WOULD HAVE TO BE FORTHCOMING FROM WASHINGTON.
BUT VALUE OF MISSILE SITES WAS PRESUMABLY SO GREAT
THAT THE SOVIETS FELT JUSTIFIED IN TAKING RISK; MOREOVER
THEY MAY HAVE BANKED ON INSTALLATION BEING ERECTED
VERY QUICKLY. IN AN AIR OF GENERALLY PEACEFUL EAST-
WEST RELATIONS WITH THEMSELVES DOING EVERYTHING TO
PLAY DOWN AN IMMINENT BERLIN CRISIS, THEY MAY HAVE HOPED
THAT US, FINDING THEMSELVES FACED WITH A FAIT ACCOMPLI,
AND RECOGNIZING A SOVIET COMMITMENT EVEN IF IN GENERAL
TERMS TO DEFEND CUBA AND PROTECT SHIPPING TO IT, WOULD
IN END ACCEPT SITUATION WITH NOTHING MORE THAN LOUD NOISES
AND APPEALS TO THE UN ETC AT WHICH INCIDENTALLY WHOLE
FOREIGN BASES ISSUE COULD BE RAISED.

2. WE THINK IT UNLIKELY THAT SOVIETS REALLY BELIEVED
THAT INSTALLATION OF MISSILE SITES WAS NECESSARY SOLELY
FOR THE DEFENSE OF CUBA AND WOULD BE ACCEPTED AS

SUCH. IT

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SUCH. IT SEEMS MUCH MORE LIKELY THAT SOVIETS DECIDED TO INSTALL MISSILE COMPLEX BECAUSE ONCE IT BECAME FULLY OPERATIONAL AT END OF THIS YEAR, IT WOULD HAVE GIVEN THEM SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN THEIR NUCLEAR STRIKE CAPACITY AGAINST US AND - IN IMPORTANT ASPECT - A CAPACITY INSIDE THE US WARNING NETWORK. IT WOULD HAVE REPRESENTED AN EXTREMELY TEMPTING SHORT CUT TOWARDS REDUCING IMBALANCE IN STRATEGIC STRIKING POWER BETWEEN SOVIETS AND US WITHOUT SOVIETS HAVING TO WAIT YEARS TO ACHIEVE THIS. HITHERTO AMOUNT OF DAMAGE SOVIETS COULD INFLICT ON US TERRITORY IN EVENT OF WAR WOULD BE LESS THAN US COULD INFLICT ON SOVIET TERRITORY - AN IMBALANCE MADE WORSE BY US DECISION TO PRODUCE 800 MINUTEMAN MISSILES, AND ONE WHICH COULD NOT QUICKLY BE REDRESSED BY INCREASED SOVIET MISSILE PRODUCTION. YET IF KHRUSHCHEV WAS TO BRING THINGS TO A HEAD FAIRLY SOON OVER BERLIN SOMETHING MUST BE DONE URGENTLY TO RECTIFY IMBALANCE IF SOVIETS WOULD BE NEGOTIATING POLITICALLY IN AN INFERIOR MILITARY POSITION. KHRUSHCHEV MAY WELL HAVE CALCULATED THAT ONCE CUBAN MISSILE COMPLEX COMPLETED HE COULD FRIGHTEN AMERICANS OFF TAKING DETERMINED ACTION IN BERLIN BY POINTING TO THEIR OWN VULNERABILITY TO ATTACK FROM HIS CUBAN BASE AND THUS OBTAIN HEAVY LEVERAGE IN NEGOTIATIONS ON BERLIN WHICH HE HAS BEEN PLANNING FOR THE END OF YEAR.

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